

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The City of Rockville's comprehensive master plan is based on the following fundamental vision:

Rockville will continue to be a city that emphasizes the characteristics of a small town community, offers an excellent quality of life, provides a responsive government serving its citizens, and has a distinct positive identity tied to its history.

The master plan describes the broad vision for the City's future. It is the core philosophy that directs all development activities in Rockville. It guides where and in what form development occurs in the community and frames the city's capital improvement projects. It is used to test the appropriateness of both public and private development proposals. During the life of the plan, decisions will be made on land use issues and budget priorities. These decisions will be judged by the extent to which they correspond with the master plan.

The master plan is a compilation of goals, policies, and recommendations for each of the subject areas it covers. **Goals** are conceptual, broad, and long range. **Policies** are the guides to the achievement of the goals. **Recommendations** define the specific actions needed to accomplish the overall goal as well as the policies.

The master plan has a 20-year time frame. However, the Annotated Code of Maryland mandates that the master plan be reviewed or amended every six years. This helps to ensure that the document is updated to reflect current conditions and philosophy.

#### BACKGROUND

##### Underlying Principles

The following are the planning principles that provide the foundation for the specific goals and policies that are articulated in each chapter.

Rockville will be a city that:

1. Protects the character of its neighborhoods;
2. Develops a sense of a cohesive community that overcomes physical barriers and links neighborhoods;
3. Fosters a vibrant Town Center that has a distinctive character;
4. Provides a diversity of integrated transportation options;
5. Emphasizes its parks and open spaces;
6. Respects the natural environment and historic resources, and promotes the responsible, sustainable use of natural resources for present and future populations;
7. Provides a high level of community services and facilities;
8. Maintains a safe and secure community;

9. Encourages a broad range of housing styles and prices;
10. Promotes active community involvement in planning and city government;
11. Recognizes the diverse nature and needs of the community;
12. Encourages a strong and diverse local economy;
13. Establishes a supportive environment for advanced technology, technological industries, and institutions of higher learning;
14. Recognizes its unique position as the governmental center of Montgomery County.

### **Legal Authority of the Plan**

The preparation of a master plan is the legal responsibility of the Rockville Planning Commission under the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 66B, Section 3.05, also known as the Planning Act. It states that “it is the function and duty of the Planning Commission to make and approve a plan which ... shall serve as a guide to public and private actions and decisions to ensure the development of public and private property in appropriate relationships.” The plan must include the following elements:

1. Statement of goals, objectives, principles, policies, and standards
2. Land use plan element including urban growth areas
3. Transportation plan element
4. Community facilities plan element
5. Mineral resources plan (if appropriate)
6. Identification of areas of critical State concern (if appropriate)
7. Sensitive area element/environmental quality
8. Recommendations for implementation encouraging the following:
  - a. Streamlined review of applications for development, including permit review and subdivision review within the areas designated for growth in the plan;
  - b. The use of flexible development regulations to promote innovative and cost-saving site design and protect the environment; and
  - c. Economic development in areas designated for growth in the plan through the use of innovative techniques.

In addition to these items, the Rockville Master Plan includes the following subject areas: Residential Neighborhood Areas; Economic Development/Non-Residential Areas; the Town Center; Historic Preservation; Housing; Recreation, Parks and Open Space; and Community Appearance and Design.

The Planning Act also mandates that a community’s master plan implement the following visions:

1. Development is concentrated in suitable areas;
2. Sensitive areas are protected;
3. In rural areas, growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected;
4. Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic;
5. Conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption, is practiced;
6. To assure the achievement of 1 through 5 above, economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined;

7. Adequate public facilities and infrastructure under the control of the county or municipal corporation are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur (added October 1, 2000), and
8. Funding mechanisms are addressed to achieve these visions.

These visions are based on the widely accepted visions prepared in the wake of the 1987 Chesapeake Bay Agreement. Maryland joined Virginia, Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, the Chesapeake Bay Commission, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in agreeing to a number of steps to clean up the Bay, including commitments to address the impact of rapid population growth and development. This landmark agreement was updated in June, 2000 with the signing of the new "Chesapeake 2000" agreement. The Chesapeake 2000 agreement will guide the Bay cleanup effort over the next decade and has the primary goal of improving water quality sufficiently to sustain the living resources of the Chesapeake Bay and to maintain that water quality into the future. This is seen as the most comprehensive and far-reaching goal in the Bay Program's history. A major commitment of the new agreement is creating a Watershed Partnership, committing all citizens of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed in a shared vision. The City of Rockville shares in this commitment through its policies and land use practices, and participation in the Middle Potomac Tributary Strategy development process.

The Planning Act instructs local governments to encourage development in designated growth areas. A basic premise of the Act is that quality of life is a fine balance between continued economic growth and preservation of landscapes, open spaces, and the unique character of each community. Maryland's "Smart Growth" philosophy is a direct outcome of the Act. Rockville is a designated "corridor city" as determined in the original *"...on Wedges and Corridors"* master plan that was developed by the Maryland-National Park and Planning Commission in 1964 and reaffirmed in the *"General Plan Refinement of the Goals and Objectives for Montgomery County"* in 1993. The challenge for Rockville will be to maintain its desired sense of small town community spirit and unique quality within the larger metropolitan Washington area.

### **Brief History of Rockville's Growth and Past Master Plans**

In the late 1600s, land in Montgomery County began to be parceled out to a variety of individuals who gradually started farms in the area. By the mid 1700s, a small hamlet near the Town Center was evolving into a thriving crossroads community between Frederick and Georgetown. The Hungerford Resolves passed in 1774 at Hungerford Tavern supported the protest against England's tea tax that led to the Boston Tea Party. After Montgomery County was created in 1776, Rockville was chosen as the county seat (although at that time, the settlement was called either Hungerford's or Montgomery Court House depending upon the historical source).



The core of the community was situated on the 200 acres owned by William Prather Williams. In 1784, he subdivided approximately 45 acres into lots and formally named the area Williamsburgh. The 1798 tax assessment indicated that 29 lots were improved (15 with houses), 38 lots were held by the Williams family, and 20 were sold with no improvements.

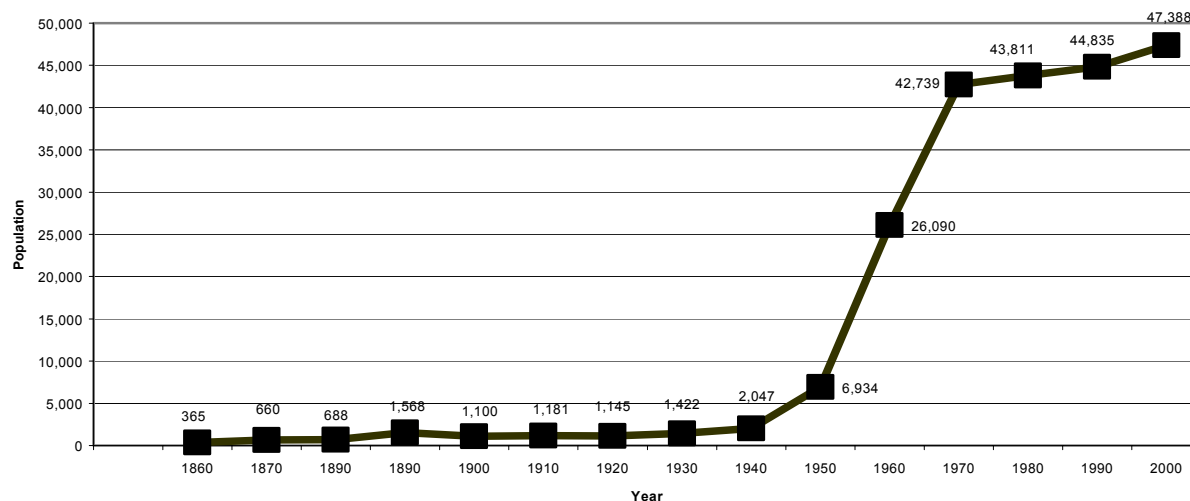
In 1801, the town was officially chartered by the State of Maryland. Its name was changed to Rockville in 1803 because of its proximity to Rock Creek. Also in 1803, the town was re-surveyed and enlarged. This “Plan of Rockville” established the heart of the city as it is known today – a 15-block grid of lots separated by two major north-south streets (Adams and Washington), one major east-west street (Jefferson), and three east-west lanes (Wood, Middle and Commercial).

In 1860, Rockville was incorporated as a city by an act of the Maryland General Assembly, enabling the citizens to collect and disburse funds for improvement of the common good, regulate growth, legislate to maintain order, and provide the town certain rights and privileges in its dealings with the State and County. It also added 73 acres to the city for a total of 133 acres with a total population of 365.

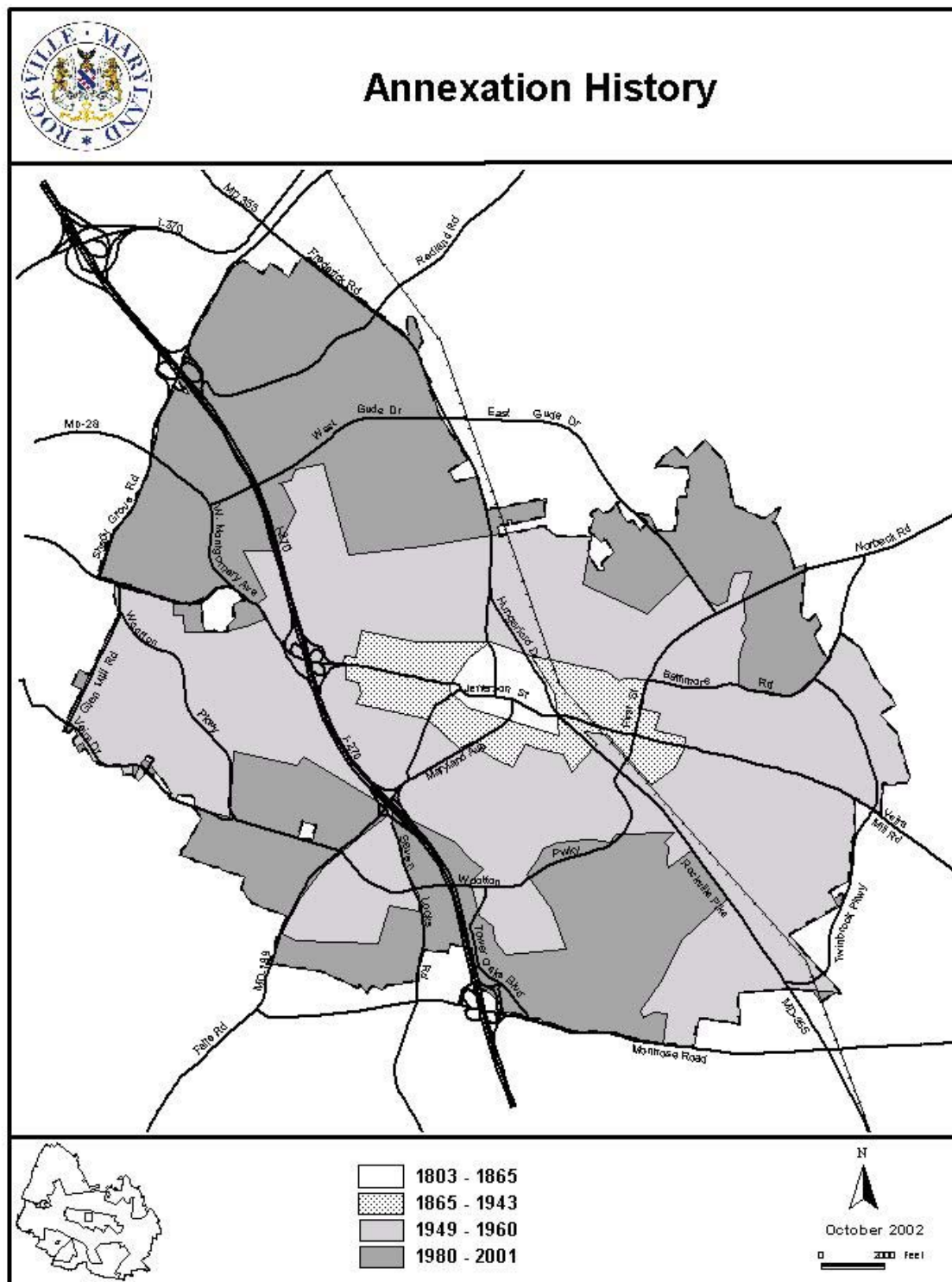
Another dramatic change occurred when the Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad reached Rockville in 1873. This opened a direct transportation link to the greater metropolitan areas of Washington and Baltimore and stimulated the growth of the city. During the two decades following the arrival of the railroad, Rockville annexed approximately 88 acres. Land speculation boomed almost exclusively for housing developments, such as the West End Park. At the same time, African-American communities were developing just outside of the city limits both in formally platted subdivisions, such as Lincoln Park, and informally in small groupings of houses. Clustered around the County courthouse, the downtown continued to develop towards the north and east in the direction of the railroad. The community was considered attractive, healthful, and provided a pleasant escape from the Washington, D.C. summer heat.

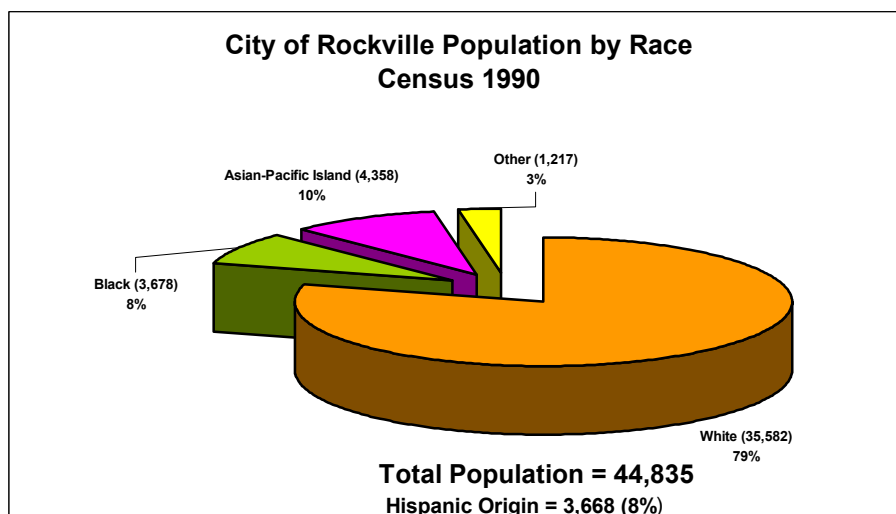
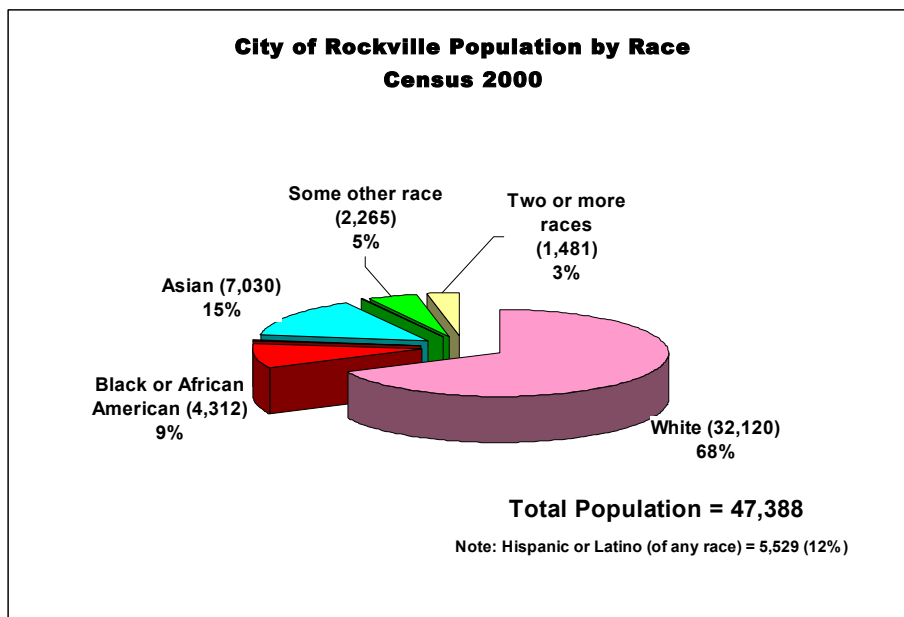
Dramatic growth did not occur again until the late 1940s, when Twinbrook and Lincoln Park were annexed into Rockville. With these and other annexations, the land area of the city increased to a total of 2,752 acres in 1950. The population increased from 1,422 in 1930 to 6,934 in 1950. Population increased even more dramatically to 26,000 in 1960 and to 42,825 in 1970. However, the population only increased to 43,811 in 1980 and to 44,835 in 1990. In 2000, the population for the City rose to 47,388. The King Farm development is not

City of Rockville  
Population Growth - 1860-2000



completed, and the Fallsgrove Development is just beginning construction. Racial and ethnic diversity continues to increase as demonstrated by the following graphics.





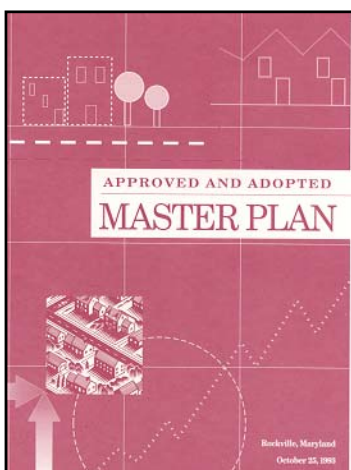
The Rockville Planning Commission adopted its first master plan in 1960 after several years of study and consideration. This plan was the second in the state after Baltimore. The plan established 10.9% of the City's total area as a goal for industrial use (from approximately 4.8% of the previous land area devoted to industrial) and outlined where the growth should occur. It also recommended "that the scattered commercial areas be consolidated where possible and that boundaries to eliminate commercial sprawl be established." The plan recommended that the Central Business District serve three major functions: 1) a commercial retail center; 2) a governmental center; and 3) a professional and business office center. The "protected residential neighborhood" concept was developed to insulate neighborhoods from "foreign" traffic. The plan was effective, and growth was orderly and generally similar to current residential and commercial patterns. Public services kept pace with development (after a previous water shortage), and older parts of the city were improved through a variety of urban renewal programs. The growth that took place was closely aligned with the community's stated goals.



In 1964, The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission adopted “...on *Wedges and Corridors – A General Plan for the Maryland-Washington Regional District in Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties.*” This plan organized development into a number of corridors that originated from an urban ring around Washington, D.C. The corridors were conceived to be areas of dense development located along a major transportation route. The corridors were to be separated by wedges. These areas were to remain in parkland, agriculture, and low density/rural housing. Thus, the majority of the population would live in the corridors where it would be easier to provide public facilities rather than be dispersed throughout the county. The wedges would provide open space, wildlife habitat and parkland for the entire population’s enjoyment. The City of Rockville was designated as a corridor city.

The 1970 City of Rockville Master Plan was built on the foundation that had been established by the 1960 Plan. The 1970 Plan recognized the importance of the ...on *Wedges and Corridors* plan, reinforced existing development patterns, and introduced a few new proposed changes to the existing zoning. This plan suggested expanding the restricted industrial park areas near I-270 similar to their current configuration and in keeping with the ...on *Wedges and Corridors* plan. The plan also stressed the importance of the “Central Business District” [Town Center] to the City and City’s desire to increase retail use within the district so that it could compete within the region. This plan also discussed current and future recreational and open space needs. The concept of sharing school facilities was proposed as was the development of a stream valley park system and a bike-walkway system. However, the plan stated that “Rockville is principally a residential community.”

In 1981, 74 technical corrections were made to the Land Use Plan Map. In 1982, an amendment to the master plan was added to address historic preservation. Also in 1982, a policy statement was added to guide the preparation of neighborhood plans. Between 1982 and 1990, seven neighborhood plans were prepared and adopted as amendments to the master plan. These were for the Croydon Park Neighborhood (Planning Area 2) in 1986; the Hungerford, Stoneridge, and New Mark Commons Neighborhood (Planning Area 3) in 1985; the West End, Woodley Gardens Neighborhood (Planning Area 4) in 1989; the Lincoln Park Neighborhood (Planning Area 6) in 1984; the Twinbrook Neighborhood (Planning area 8) in 1982; the Rockville Pike Neighborhood (Planning Area 9) in 1989; and the Westmont, Tower Oaks Neighborhood (Planning Area 12) in 1985. A separate plan for the Town Center was also completed in 1979.



The 1993 *General Plan Refinement of the Goals and Objectives for Montgomery County* reaffirms the wedges and corridors plan and “further defines the components of the Wedges and Corridors concept that have evolved during the past two decades.” (p. 3) Further, the *Refinement* states that “the ‘Urban Ring’ around that center [Washington] and the radial ‘Corridors’ leading from it are as important today as they were in 1964. The Urban Ring and I-270 Corridor offer the best pattern for transit serviceability and provide the area in which major compact centers can flourish.”

Also in 1993, the City of Rockville approved and adopted a new master plan. This master plan was very detailed and had a different format and content organization than previous plans. However, it generally continued the past land use philosophies of the 1960 and

the 1970 plans. The 1993 plan redefined the urban growth boundary, called for comprehensive development planning for large areas of vacant land that were to be annexed into the city, and included new chapters on Environmental Quality/Sensitive Areas, Community Appearance and Design, Historic Preservation, Residential Neighborhoods, and Non-Residential Neighborhoods. The plan recognized that “future development within the existing corporate limits of Rockville will be of two types – redevelopment and infill.”



#### **A Case Study in Community-Based Innovation**

In late 1996, the City initiated a visioning process called “Imagine Rockville: Shaping the Future.” Six visioning sessions were held and were attended by 150 people.

In December 1996 a steering committee which was appointed by the Mayor and Council selected 70 participants to review and evaluate the ideas from the community forums and to develop a series of vision points. This was accomplished in January 1997. A community vision fair was held to receive community input and to adjust the vision points which were then presented to the community in April. Citizen action teams that corresponded to the seven visions also were set up to develop ways to implement the goals. The seven visions centered on “Diversity and Cultural Arts, Environment, Economic Development, Neighborhoods, Technology, and Transportation.

This revision of the master plan has attempted to involve citizens to identify strategic issues, challenges, and problems facing the city in addition to developing a vision for Rockville’s future. In November 1999, a general meeting was held to review the goals of the 1993 plan and to initiate policies from new ideas. In March 2000, the Mayor and Council and the Planning Commission held a workshop to discuss critical issues confronting the City. In late spring, three separate citizen focus groups/workshops were held to discuss chapter topics and to generate citizen input on the topics. A citizens’ fair/open house was held in June 2000 for citizen input on the draft goals and policies developed by the Planning Commission after receiving the comments from the focus groups.

In general, this plan reaffirms the City’s commitment to the integrity of neighborhoods, a variety of housing options, the Town Center, the environment, open space, parks, a superior recreation system, and a multi-modal transportation system.